Austin Riopel. Keeping an Ear to the Ground: Investigating the Practices, Attitudes, and Interests of Triangle-area Music Venue Operators Regarding the Preservation of Local Music Culture. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. March, 2020. 34 pages. Advisor: Megan Winget

This paper considers the theoretical and practical importance of collecting and preserving artifacts of local music culture as well as the potential role of heritage institutions in these endeavors. After examining the literature to help establish a definition of local music culture and understand the importance of its collection within the mission of heritage institutions, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the owners and operators of music venues within the Triangle region of Central North Carolina to determine the degree to which they engage in preservation activities as well as their interest in partnering with heritage institutions to preserve the history of their respective communities.

Headings:

Music archives

Library & community

Local history materials

Cultural activities

Preservation of sound recording

KEEPING AN EAR TO THE GROUND: INVESTIGATING THE PRACTICES, ATTITUDES, AND INTERESTS OF TRIANGLE-AREA MUSIC VENUE OPERATORS REGARDING THE PRESERVATION OF LOCAL MUSIC CULTURE

by
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Introduction

In the fall of 2019, I started working as a sound engineer at The Cave, a small and aptly named music venue on Franklin Street somewhere near the border of Chapel Hill and Carrboro, North Carolina. I found this work interesting and rewarding– a chance to hear new and interesting music and meet the remarkable folks who wrote and performed it. When I first started, I was regaled with countless tales of acts that had once played at The Cave that had gone on to "make it," becoming nationally well-known and successful— bands like R.E.M., Arcade Fire, and Southern Culture on the Skids. Early on during my tenure as "the sound guy," I had the impulse to start recording shows so that the performances I was helping to facilitate might be enjoyed by folks that were not present at the club on any particular evening. I was surprised and inspired to find a collection that was similar to the one I was developing housed within the Southern Folklife Collection in the Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. It seemed that one of my predecessors at The Cave, Craig Zearfoss, had possessed a similar inclination toward documenting and preserving the musical events that occurred in and around Chapel Hill, and that he had donated his collection to UNC's archive. I explored the collection with great interest, and wondered if my own recordings might be considered culturally or academically interesting enough to one day be preserved.

This exploration led me to consider a number of questions. What are the factors that warrant materials' inclusion in university archives? What are the attitudes of archives and archivists towards "local" or independent music? Why are those beliefs held

and how are they formed? What even *is* local or independent music? How has the internet and the increased availability of cheap, easy-to-use recording equipment influenced the creation and preservation of music outside the mainstream? Through an investigation of relevant literature, I will establish a working definition of local/independent music, examine its relationship with archival institutions, and look into past and present initiatives that exist within these information ecosystems. Then, through semi-structured interviews with the owners and operators of local music venues, I will seek to learn the documentation and preservation practices already in place in music performance establishments in the Triangle Region of North Carolina in addition to assessing business operators' attitudes toward and interest in participating in processes of cultural preservation.

Literature Review

Setting the Scene

To begin to consider these questions, we need to consider what constitutes independent music and what can be considered a local music venue. In an article examining the role of the internet within the globalization of independent music, Holly Kruse notes that "indie music scenes provided recruiting grounds for the mainstream music industry and markers of identity of music scene participants."[1] This situates the idea of "indie music" in opposition to "mainstream music," a helpful if slightly blurred distinction that seems to focus mainly on the existence of corporate support for the process of making, marketing, and distributing musical products. Whether something is considered "independent," in this sense, has little to do with musical genre, instead focusing on the presence or absence of logistical and financial backing of a given artist by a traditional media company. This admittedly arbitrary definition is the one that will be used in this paper, if for no other reason than that it offers the best chance of offering a clear distinction between differing types of musical entities and the spaces in which they perform.

These musical and cultural environments, colloquially referred to as "scenes," represent complex and subjective interactions of geography, musicology, and identity

[1] Kruse, 625

which have been rendered even more opaque by the globalizing forces of the internet. Whereas cities or regions might have once been associated with the production of a certain *type* of music, this is less and less the case. This phenomenon predates the influence of the internet, as noted by Kruse, who writes that "trans-local networks… brought institutions and people in disparate local scenes together in broader systems of cultural production and dissemination."[2] However, the ease and speed with which geographic boundaries can be transcended has certainly increased as the internet has become ever more ubiquitous in our economic, social, and creative lives. This is not to say that music has migrated entirely to the digital realm. Indeed, Kruse notes that "in the new media environment local spaces and identities remain important, providing the necessary infrastructure still required for music scenes to survive."[3] This emphasizes the necessity of physical space in the life of music production and consumption, and the importance of locations where music can be performed and observed. It is this central characteristic that I am going to focus on for defining "local" music venues: as spaces where musical performance is an integral part of regular operations. As Hathaway notes, "local music is any music that has played some role in the cultural life of a town, city, county, or state."[4] Following that logic, we can consider local music venues as any space that serves as a gathering space for the facilitation of that cultural life.

Documenting Independent Music: A Short History

Librarians, ethnomusicologists, and archivists have long been interested in capturing and documenting musical subcultures, although what exactly constitutes a

[2] Kruse, 629.
[3] Kruse, 631.
[4] Hathaway, 483.

subculture has been a topic of shifting debate. In this section, in order to demonstrate that interest, I will provide several examples from the literature that speak to the historical and continued interest in local music within these fields.

In 1940, Harold Spivacke, Chief of the Music Division of the Library of Congress, gave a talk entitled "The collection of musical material of local interest," which was published by the Music Library Association in their journal *Notes.* Within his remarks he blurs the distinction between national and local, stating that though "We in the Library of Congress like to think of ourselves as having no local interests whatever," "a truly national outlook must be based on the interests of all the localities which make up our nation."[5] In other words, like politics, all music is inherently both local and national. Establishing his hope for the future after receiving a grant from the Carnegie Corporation that would supply the Library of Congress with recording equipment, Spivacke remarks, "I should like to look forward to the day when all the music librarians of the country will take a more active role in the preservation and dissemination of [folkmusic]."[6] I find this distinction extremely interesting, particularly the reference to "folkmusic." When folk music is referenced today, we tend to imagine a particular genre. But I suspect that what Spivacke was referring to was more closely aligned with the definition I provided earlier in my discussion of independent music— music made outside of mainstream media spaces. The artists (examples of whom include Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, and Burl Ives) that would be recorded by the grant-provided equipment spanned a wide range of genres; more important than musical style was that they had not

[5] Spivacke, 49.
[6] Spivacke, 53.

yet been recorded and at that time were largely unknown outside of their respective communities.

Some of these same sentiments were echoed in a 1967 article by music librarian Dena J. Epstein, titled "On Collecting Materials for Local Music Histories." Within, she notes that "the local history of music… has more than a regional interest, since definitive treatments of music in the United States cannot be written until local studies provide the groundwork."[7] This idea is remarkably similar to the notion of independent music scenes comprising a foundation or recruiting ground for more traditional media production ventures expressed by Kruse nearly half a century later. And like Spivacke, Epstein closes with a testament to the importance of active preservation practices on the community level. She writes: "In gathering and preserving the record of musical accomplishment of its own region, the public library can help to provide the basis for a true understanding of our musical past and the kind of musical community that exists today— a contribution to the cultural and social growth of the country as a whole that can only increase in value with the passage of time."[8]

In a 1989 article, librarian Edward W. Hathaway agrees with Epstein, stating that "a full understanding of musical culture necessitates studying all levels of musical life."[9] In spite of this, he laments the fact that "collections of local music in the United States remain scattered, meager, and still largely unused."[10] As a remedy he proposes the consolidation of far-flung and poorly organized local collections into a state archive,

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[7] Epstein, 18.
[8] Epstein, 21.
[9] Hathaway, 483.
[10] Hathaway, 483.

which would "function both as a depository… and as a site for research."[11] While noting that "this is pioneering work that badly needs to be done," Hathaway acknowledges the temporal, budgetary, and effort-based obstacles that stand in the way of comprehensive collection and preservation of local music at any sort of large scale.[12]

All of this serves to demonstrate that the collection and preservation of musical materials at the local level, outside of mainstream creation and distribution channels, has long been a stated priority of heritage institutions like libraries and archives. That being said, the media landscape has more recently undergone significant changes that present both opportunities and obstacles. These include the economic and cultural forces of globalization, the development of increasingly affordable and portable recording hardware and software, the ease and affordability of storage of previously impracticable quantities of digital data, and the inherent difficulty of keeping track of it all. In the next section, we will examine some more modern takes on the techniques, rationales, and initiatives that have been applied to collecting and preserving music at the local level.

The Lay of the Land

The sentiments and aspirations first espoused by Spivacke and later echoed by Epstein and Hathaway are frequently found in more contemporary literature. Sean Luyk wrote in a 2013 article that "Local and regional music collections are a topic of increasing interest in music librarianship in recent years" and that "music librarians may be refocusing their efforts on local music."[13] Australian scholar Sarah Baker writes that "over the last three decades there has been a growing interest in the cultural value of

[11] Hathaway, 483.
[12] Hathaway, 493.
[13] Luyk, 22.

popular music's material past… that has led to a proliferation of archives, museums, and halls of fame devoted to the collection, preservation, curation, and celebration of popular music heritage."[14] Despite this proliferation of hope and interest in documenting and preserving local music culture, some obstacles undoubtedly remain.

As John Vallier explains in a 2010 article in *Notes*, "sound archives face no dearth of challenges: staffing shortages, copyright ambiguities, format obsolescence, preservation concerns, cataloging costs, facility upkeep, administrative support, and — underscoring them all—receding funding lines."[15] This list of concerns is combined with "ethnomusicology's disquieting colonial and evolutionary origins."[16] In addition, archivists struggled with a changing media landscape that was becoming more and more digital, and thus more ephemeral. Judy Tsou and John Valier discuss these issues at length in a 2016 article titled "Ether Today, Gone Tomorrow: 21st Century Sound Recording Collection in Crisis," where they note that the current model of digital music distribution, which involves strict limits on licensing for music consumers "may benefit a music distributor's bottom line, but… does not guarantee access for the long term."[17] Tellingly, they also note that "items most crucial for a scholar's research and a musician's study are often drawn from the obscure, which is much less likely to be made available in perpetuity by a commercial distributor."[18]

So how are we to approach these myriad concerns? The consensus answer among scholars seems to be for the conscientious sound archive to take a more active role in

[14] Baker, 170.
[15] Vallier, 39.
[16] Vallier, 2017, 309.
[17] Tsou & Vallier, 463.
[18] Tsou & Vallier, 463.

developing collections, engaging in what Landau and Fargion call "collaborative archiving" or "applied ethnomusicology," processes that "engage members of relevant communities in the archiving process, which in turn will continue to create knowledge."[19] Vallier too emphasizes the importance of community partnerships, claiming that they "make… collections, along with the archives and libraries that cradle them, more meaningful, relevant, and resilient."[20]

There are a number of case studies available from various scholars that detail attempts to engage musical communities in participating in the archival process that seem to regard these endeavors as something of a win-win, resulting in improved preservation of important cultural heritage materials as well as renewed interest in and engagement with sound archives.[21] The specifics of each case are less important than the lesson that we can take from them in the aggregate, that practices like "collaborative archiving," "applied ethnomusicology," and "communal archiving… where regional connections and collections are built through dialogue and mutually beneficial exchange" represent a shift in the role of archives within the cultural lives of communities and the nations they comprise, rendering them "a space where intellectual authority is no longer the exclusive domain of ivory tower inhabitants."[22]

Conclusion

In order to consider communal archiving in the central North Carolina music community, one initial step could be to assess the practices, attitudes, and interests of

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[19] Landau & Fargion, 136-137.
[20] Vallier, 39.
[21] Baker 2016; Baker & Huber 2016; Daniels et al. 2013; Johnson 2012; Long et al. 2017; Luyk 2013; Ruskin 2016; Vallier 2010; Valier 2017.
[22] Landau and Fargion, 136-137; Vallier, 49.

local stakeholders. Among these numerous stakeholders, which include bands, fans, booking agents, managers, and others, I have identified the operators of music venues as representing perhaps the most efficient way to access the greatest amount of ephemeral live music culture. Because their businesses serve as centralized locations where much of an area's cultural life of takes place, collaborating with these individuals and their organizations could be an effective means to reach out to and account for the greatest possible number of stakeholders. Through my research, I will attempt to learn the answers to the following questions. Do local music venue operators participate in practices of documentation and preservation? If so, what are they? What are the attitudes of local music venue operators towards the preservation of musical culture at the local level? And if opportunities for collaboration with heritage institutions exist, would local music venue operators pursue them?

Methods

Overview

Guidance as far the methods and methodology of this study was taken primarily from two texts, *Doing Interview Based Qualitative Research: A Learner's Guide* by Eva Magnusson and Jeanne Maracek and *How to Write Qualitative Research* by Marcus B. Weaver-Hightower. In keeping with the principles of critical ethnography, I did not seek to "bury" my biases, but rather to honestly and openly acknowledge them, as well as their potential effects on this study.[23] At times, circumstances dictated some minor deviation from the methods described in these two works. Those deviations are disclosed, described, and explained later in this section– and further addressed in the discussion section.

Information was gathered via semi-structured interviews with owners and operators of Triangle area businesses that feature live music as a part of their regular operations. Among the businesses that were invited to participate were entities that identified as bars, nightclubs, restaurants, and specifically as music venues. The distinctions between these different types of businesses are somewhat murky, and outside the scope of my interest for this project. Of primary concern was whether or not the business regularly served as a site for musical performance.

[23] Hightower, 175.

As a self-identified member of the Triangle music community and as a music venue employee, I was personally acquainted with a number of venue owners and operators, and was familiar with many of the places where musical performances occur in the area. I started my search for participants with individuals with whom I had personal relationships, and consulted with them along with other music community colleagues to determine other possible participants. I reached out to potential interviewees via email, text message, and Facebook message to solicit their participation. Once they had agreed to participate, interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience. Due to precautions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, I offered to meet with participants via phone, zoom, or in-person in a socially-distanced manner. I left it up to the interviewee to determine which form the interview took. Audio from each interview was recorded and relevant quotes were selected, transcribed, and analyzed.

About the Interviews

Interviews consisted of open-ended questions that attempted to determine participants' personal histories and rationales for owning and operating music venues, their conception and description of the communities within their organizations and of which their organizations are a part, their familiarity with heritage institutions and efforts to document and preserve local music culture, their existing practices of documentation/preservation, and their attitudes and interests towards maintaining or establishing relationships with heritage institutions in order to document and preserve the history of their organizations.

The goal of these interviews was to elicit the perspectives and opinions of venue owners and operators, and so I made conscious efforts to ensure interviewees that there

was no “correct” answer to any of my questions, rather that I was simply interested in what they had to say on these topics. When necessary, questions were clarified, repeated, or rephrased.

The somewhat casual nature of the interview process was intended to build rapport with participants and make the process as easy as possible for them. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic presented additional considerations, as I knew that many venue owners and operators would be facing considerable challenges related to the operations of their businesses being disrupted, interrupted, or ceased altogether. I felt that it was important to be sensitive to these potential concerns and to make the interview process as low-stakes and enjoyable as possible for participants. To help ensure that this goal was met, I solicited and incorporated feedback from participants about the goals and implementation of this study.

Transcription

Due to time and budget constraints, full transcripts of the interviews were not prepared. Recordings of each interview were listened to multiple times and relevant quotes were transcribed with the corresponding timestamp. Because the goal of this study was to simply gather the opinions of relevant stakeholders, I believe that this method of transcription was sufficient for capturing the desired information.

Participant Anonymity

Although participants were not promised anonymity, names and other identifying information have been removed from transcribed quotations in order to err on the side of protecting participants’ privacy. References to specific venues or individuals were replaced with generic de-identified terms like “the venue” or “the former owner/owners.”

This allows quotations to maintain their original meaning and spirit without violating the privacy of participants or other individuals that participants mentioned in their responses. In order to maintain a degree of transparency, any such alteration presented in the results or discussion sections of this paper will be in italics.

Results

Overall, twelve individuals from nine different businesses were contacted to participate in interviews. Nine of the twelve responded that they would like to participate in interviews, and three did not respond to my requests. Due to scheduling and time constraints, only four interviews from individuals associated with three different venues could be conducted in time for the writing of this paper. Participants 1 and 4 were the owners of two different small private clubs that featured live music nightly. Participant 2 was the owner and sound engineer of a mid-size music venue, the distinction between private club and music venue in this case being that the latter is only open for performances. Participant 3 is the former talent buyer, bar manager, and co-owner from the same venue as Participant 2. Despite the small sample size, there were a number of trends that became apparent over the course of conducting and analyzing the interviews.

Rationale

Participants all cited their experience as performers and/or patrons in local music venues as a key part of their rationale for becoming involved in the ownership or operation of their respective businesses. Participant 1 stated,

> "It all started because I have been a musician myself… that progressed to me working in music venues and just being around that atmosphere of musicians and a music space and just having lots of friends that are musicians and we're kind of like the birds that flock together" (0:24-1:01).

Participant 3 reported a similar narrative:

> "I was looking for venues in the area and during my orientation trip I went by *the space*. And then when I moved in I went to a show one of the first couple days I

> lived here and just always kind of went there. I started working door, and then six months later I started booking it, and then years later owned it, and then sold it… I liked the place before I worked there. It was nice to start with one perspective and just go through all the way, get every aspect of it in. I just did it because I wanted to be around music and it was the place I liked the most" (1:31-2:57).

Participant 4 shared a story about their chance visit to a particular small New York venue over the course of a long layover that inspired them to found their local music venue. They explained, "I really liked their joint, they'd been open for a couple of years and we wanted to do something like it" (2:25-2:30). Participant 2 was a little bit hazier on the origins of their involvement in the community of venue operators, stating, "I'm old as dirt. I've worked at *the venue* since 1999. Worked there through 5 different owners, six including myself... It's been a tumultuous ride" (3:00-3:30). However, they were pretty clear on the motivation behind become involved in the operation of a music venue stating "the only reason you would ever invest any time into promoting and supporting music… you gotta love it" (3:35-3:41).

The Triangle Music Community

Participants described the Triangle music community in the following ways. Participant 1 stated,

> "I think for the amount of people that live around here we have a lot of really talented musicians. Per capita, let's put it that way. It's a good scene in that respect. Being that it's a college town, it's a little bit more open-minded, a little bit more liberal and laid back. People are willing to think outside the box a little bit more as far as music goes and encourage each other to be weird if you want to be or do something different. You don't always have to keep strict rules on music. To me our local music community really feels that way" (7:44-8:54).

Participant 3 remarked on the diversity of the Triangle music community, describing the numerous sub-communities of which it is comprised: "there are different scenes within the Triangle music community… There are little bubbles of people that are consistent

across shows but I wouldn't say it's one scene" (12:25-15:56). They added that "There's like a music scene but it's not singular. I knew who I would see based on what kind of show was coming up... It's kind of genre and it's kind of association" (14:32-15:05). Participants 2 and 4 did not have much to say about the area's music community writ large, preferring to focus on their own respective businesses.

Self-Perception and Role of the Venue

Participants also reported similarly on their perception of their own businesses and their roles within that community. Regarding how they viewed their own business, Participant 1 stated that they saw it as a "little club where people start out. A good venue for bands that are just starting or also a good spot for touring bands when they swing through town" (2:15-2:37). On their desired vision for the space, they added, "you want to create a space where people feel good about playing music, they feel good about being there" (4:32-4:40). Participant 2 stated simply, "It's a space for things to happen" (26:09-26:11), adding that "the entire organization revolves around the show" (31:08-31:14). Participant 3 stated "I just wanted to make the space open and accommodating for any… music communities to come in and just take it over for a night" (5:48-6:28). Participant 4 reflected on how music has been a constant part of their business's operations: "It's gone through many different iterations but there's always been live music" (3:22-3:29). They added that:

> "We've always been, from the very beginning, we hire musicians... We've always been there for everybody. The ethos of the place is we don't take any money from the bands. They make money from the first person that walks in the door, we charge no production costs... We try to support the artists through allowing them to work here and also play here and make money" (6:25-7:22).

This description segues nicely into the roles that the participants envisioned their businesses playing within the cultural ecosystem of the area. Participant 4 clearly viewed his business as a potential resource for musicians in a number of ways, including as a place of employment, noting that "on again off again, our staff is usually between 50 and 75% musicians... We're very accommodating if people need to take off for two months to go tour" (7:34-8:22). However, they were hesitant to characterize their business as a community resource, stating that

> "I look at everything as a way to make money but I also don't want to have my foot on the neck of anybody and I want people to go along for the ride rather than propel me... I want people to have the opportunity to make money. I sell my drinks, they sell their music. Yes it works out well for everybody but I wouldn't put it so altruistically as I'm there for [musicians]. I'm there with them" (10:02-10:46).

Participant 1 regarded their role in a slightly different perspective. They responded:

> "I always felt like we were almost running like a non-profit business for the musicians. A lot of the money taken in was given back to the musicians, especially touring musicians. We would try to raise as much money as possible for the musicians" (11:22-11:45).

Participant 3 described their business model in contrast to that of a bar, noting that "you have to get people in the door and it's based on programming… It never feels static because it's always changing" (5:48-6:28). Regarding their specific role as talent buyer, they reflected on the curatorial aspect of the work, stating that "It's curation, but it was also having to know your market, know what your market is going to respond to... You just had to know what you could draw from the community... You just had to curate to the market" (16:13-16:56). Regarding the idea of the small venue as a money-making venture, they responded that

> "We should look at venues more like community spaces and not just capitalistic businesses because they're really not. They're not things that people are going to

> get rich off of, they're not stuff that people make a lot of money booking shows... It's not a high profit thing" (44:06-45:12).

This response echoed sentiments from earlier in our interview, when they stated that "It's all out of a place where you just like and appreciate music. That's why you get involved in the first place, it's not like you're out there to make a huge profit" (11:20-11:34). Participant 2 responded similarly, noting, "you've got to be supportive of everything. You have to have an open mind" (6:36-6:41) and adding that "you don't get into this jam if you don't appreciate the creativity of things" (7:12-7:18).

Existing Preservation Practices

Unsurprisingly, existing preservation practices and the motivations behind them differed widely across venues. Participant 1 responded "I am saving all the booking calendars... I don't know what kind of records the previous owners kept but I know there's some really cool stuff from the 80's that *one previous owner* has" (14:09-14:40). Asked about whether they thought that it was worthwhile or important to preserve materials related to their business, they responded, "it's pretty awesome to have relics and records going back and to have that story kind of preserved... This pandemic has thrown us for a loop but hopefully we can hang on" (15:58-16:22).

Participants 2 and 3 had a slightly more skeptical view of certain aspects of preservation. Participant 2 described some of the logistical challenges of recording shows, stating that "we never recorded shows because you have to have permission to do that and we're never set up for that. The world of live performance is different" (17:41-17:45). They did mention that if bands asked for a recording of their set, it was easy to provide them with one. However, they regarded that ease with a healthy dose of

suspicion, claiming that "everything's easy. The world is easy. Music is not supposed to be easy. It's not supposed to be safe" (19:41-19:50).

Participant 3 described their business's preservation practices as follows:

> "We didn't save much. Like, we have fliers from it. But I mostly just remember those shows and maybe they were a lot shittier than I remember them but I remember them and that's how I think that space should be" (29:15-29:25).

This echoed some of their commentary from earlier in our conversation about the role of music venues:

> "It's not like Spotify where you want to be able to recall it at any given point. The point of it is that you're there for it, maybe you talk about it later but you can't relive that through some other way. I never wanted the replay of a show. It's like I'm just there and it happens once and then it's over and I get to have experienced that– it makes it unique" (20:31-20:52).

When asked whether it was important to document the history of music venues, Participant 3 responded "I think it's good to know the history" (32:27-32:49). They favorably described the process by which they had learned the history of their venue, which was mainly through conversations with co-workers, bands, and patrons.

> "I'm happier to learn about it through talking to people about it and hearing about shows that they saw rather than seeing a video of that show which wouldn't have gotten the experience that you get from the oral history of it... You don't get an accurate account of what the show is like by watching a stream or recording… There's so much that goes on around a show that's not just the performance" (33:57-34:43).

Participant 4 noted that most of the documentation of their business had been performed by regional journalists and music historians, stating "if you google my name or the venue's name you can see that it's been documented pretty regularly throughout by… the people who actually write the history of the music around here" (11:13-11-20). They added that they wished they had taken a more active role in this process, remarking somewhat wistfully that:

> "In hindsight yeah I sorta wish I had a big room filled with posters and shit but I don't even… I gave all that shit away. Somebody's got it and I'm sure when I die they'll bring it all out but I wasn't a really good caretaker of the history... In hindsight I sorta wish I'd done it but I didn't" (11:25-11:56).

Awareness of Existing Initiatives by Heritage Institutions

Participants were aware of existing initiatives by heritage institutions to preserve local music culture to varying degrees. Participant 1 remarked:

> "I'm not that aware of [initiatives from heritage institutions to preserve local music history] so I'd like to find out if there's anything like that. It would be interesting to me. I don't know about that but I would like to learn more about it" (17:18-17:36).

When some current initiatives and collections, such as Chapel Hill Public Library's local music project *Tracks* or the Craig Zearfoss and Ron Liberti Collections within Wilson Library were described, Participant 1 responded "I would love to see some of that" (18:32-18:34). They also shared a question regarding the accessibility of these collections for people outside the University, asking, "can you stream material if you're not part of the University?" (18:56-18:59).

Participants 2 and 3 were unfamiliar with the efforts described above, but reported similar interest and similar questions about accessibility. Regarding the Zearfoss Collection, Participant 3 asked, "are they just recordings?" (39:17-39:20). They were particularly interested in collections of flier art.

Participant 4 was more familiar with some of the UNC affiliated initiatives, stating that "everybody's aware of what goes on over at UNC. They're pretty much the repository for all things North Carolina music" (12:46-13:00). This was qualified with the statement "I'm probably not as clued in as I should be– I'm a big fan of the library, but mostly for mysteries" (13:03-13:15).

Willingness to Partner with Heritage Institutions

Participants all expressed a willingness to engage in partnerships with heritage institutions, and even provided some of their own ideas for what those partnerships might look like. Participant 1 responded:

> "Wouldn't it be awesome to be able to somehow project some of that old footage on the outside of the building and have a parking lot viewing of some of those old performances… Just to keep people remembering the spot until we can safely reopen." (20:03-21:09)

Participant 3 wished that people and institutions would think of music venues "more like community spaces" as opposed to profit-driven businesses (44:30-44:50). They did express gratitude toward the town where their business was located, stating:

> "Luckily *the town* is a little bit more open to supporting venues. The town always seemed interested in working with *the venue* because they realized it was an important part of the town, and that's the kind of attitude that I think it needs to be approached with." (44:58-45:21)

Participant 4 envisioned a more active partnership with institutions, stating that "it would be awesome if there were some sort of repository for show posters... Someone in charge of rounding it all up" (16:02-16:50). They also noted the potential of social media for preservation purposes, noting that "YouTube does a better job than anything else right now as far as accessing shows. Just about every show that's ever been at *the venue* is up on YouTube 20 minutes after it ends" (16:54-17:06).

Discussion

Difficulties and Limitations

The greatest limitation of this study was its low response rate. I had aimed to interview 12 participants from 9 different music venues, but only 9 of 12 individuals contacted responded to my request, and only 4 individuals from 3 venues were able to make time to talk to me. This is understandable, given that venue owners' already scarce availability was likely further limited by having to dedicate significant time and energy to finding and enacting ways of keeping their businesses afloat amid the current pandemic. Though this may have been predictable, I still found myself wishing for more time given that I am in the midst of scheduling 5 more interviews at the time of this writing.

Another issue was the fact that my status as a graduate student studying library science could have impacted responses, reflecting an inflated level of enthusiasm for preservation activities and partnerships with heritage institutions. I did my best to account for this difficulty by explicitly clarifying that I was merely interested in participant perspectives and not hoping for any particular answer, but I have some doubt as to whether that strategy was actually effective. Further complicating this issue is the fact that I am friends with a number of invited participants, some of whom were interviewed and some not.

Similarly, my own status as a self-identified member of the Triangle music community and as an employee of a music venue could also perhaps be regarded as a

limitation in some senses. As a member of these communities, I have a particular sense of their value and am undoubtedly biased as to whether they should be documented and preserved. I did my best to be conscious of that bias when coming up with the interview questions, but due to the free-flowing and casual nature of the interviews themselves, I'm not certain if those efforts were truly effective.

In spite of these difficulties and limitations, I think that this study still has value in that it at least represents an attempt to engage with community members whose ongoing work is relevant to current collections. Though I was not able to engage with as much of the community as I would have liked in the time I had, I was still able to learn a lot from the individuals I spoke with about themselves, their businesses, and the communities of which they are a part.

Opportunities

Perhaps my main takeaway from this study was that there are plentiful opportunities to work with the community of Triangle area music venue owners and operators. Potential avenues for cooperation include outreach events to publicize collections that already exist within institutions, the housing or preservation of material that has already been collected, or the facilitation of developing collections having to do with music venues. In my exploration of previous or ongoing efforts on the part of heritage institutions in this sphere, it seemed that they tended to focus on reaching out to bands or performers or to depend on the efforts of community members to do the work of collecting. This is not to say that those approaches are wrong, per se, but rather that other approaches exist. Because of the importance of venues as physical spaces that facilitate the musical life of an area, it seemed that venue owners could be a productive vector that

up to this point seems to have been largely ignored. This is not to diminish the considerable efforts of institutions, but rather to point out the potential of a different mode of approaching this particular community.

Perception of and Relationship with Institutions

Another interesting concept was the perception of heritage institutions as authorities that were separate from the community. This was reflected in participants' uncertainty about whether they would be able to access materials related to their businesses that are contained within UNC's collections. This uncertainty was not entirely unwarranted; although some materials are possible to access without University credentials, others are not. The point here is not to suggest that these materials ought to be made accessible, but rather to consider how community members think about heritage institutions. Is it in the best interest of a library or an archive to be thought of as an authority that is separate from the community? Perhaps in some senses it is. But I think that it is also possible for collections and community connections to suffer as a result of this sort of separation, resulting in unrealized potential for everyone involved. Obviously, local music communities, of which the community of music venue owners and operators are a part, are far from the only communities for which this type of problem exists. And perhaps institutional efforts would be better spent elsewhere. But partnerships with area venue owners seem to be rather low-hanging fruit as far as these things go, and could have considerable impact on the perception of institutions as a part of the community, perhaps leading to further partnerships with other similar groups.

Communities as Archives

Over the course of these interviews, I was struck by the sense of community identity and community history that persisted in spite of inconsistent preservation practices or the lack of awareness of existing preservation efforts. As researchers and practitioners that are interested in the value of preservation, we would do well to remember that communities exist almost as natural archives of themselves and to exercise a bit of caution when assuming that our particular brands of preservation would be helpful to communities we hope to serve. Participant 3's particular aversion to recording shows was especially revealing here. Though it perhaps should have been more obvious, it occurred to me that a recording of a show is often vastly different from the experience of the same show, and that the event and the artifact have vastly different values to different stakeholders. Who can say what the "best" way of remembering a musical performance is? It was particularly interesting to me that two of four participants seemed to favor the collection of flier art as opposed to sound recordings.

Conclusion

At the outset of this study, I had considerable doubts as to whether local musical material was interesting or important enough to be collected by institutions. I was pleasantly surprised to learn about the long history of efforts in this sphere. The work of University of Washington archival curator John Vallier, especially the Seattle Sounds Archives Project, was particularly inspiring.[24] I wondered if a similar sort of endeavor might be possible here in the Triangle region, and thought that reaching out to venue-owners might be a productive first step towards gauging the potential of such a project.

Over the course of my research, I was consistently impressed and at times surprised at the willingness of business owners to make themselves available to discuss these topics. Although time constraints prevented the involvement of a number of individuals who had agreed to participate, I look forward to continuing to work with this community as I pursue my own goals of documenting and preserving the ongoing story of the Triangle music scene.

Obviously, many questions remain. Heritage institutions, to some degree, have a vested interest in presenting themselves as authoritative, which in some ways involves maintaining a sense of separation from the community writ large. Would partnering with music venues diminish that authority? I'm not sure, and the question is perhaps too big to

[24] *Seattle Sounds Archive Project: SSAP*, 2020

meaningfully address here. Further study of these topics would benefit from more involved conversations with stakeholders from the archival profession.

Further questions abound as to what degree collections of local music materials benefit from inclusion in traditional heritage institutions. Community archives, which have become more prevalent and popular in recent years, can provide a certain degree of freedom and flexibility that could potentially better serve this sort of collection.[25] However, many of these organizations lack the stability and financial backing to successfully accomplish their goals in the long or even medium term.[26]

This is not to say that any approach is better than any other one, or that there is a "right way" to accomplish the goals laid out by Harold Spivacke in 1940. Perhaps the thing to take away is that there are myriad ways of approaching the problem of documenting and preserving music history at the local level, and we ought to not discount any particular method or attempt to undertake this sizeable task. Rather, those interested in performing this work should endeavor to remain actively engaged with relevant community members and to seek out partnerships where they are available. This study represents one very small attempt to do just that, and in spite of its many limitations provides some background information that will perhaps be useful in future endeavors.

[25] Baker, 2016
[26] Baker & Collins, 2016

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